

MY BLACK HORSE AND A SACRED *MDZO*

Phun tshogs dbang rgyal ཕུན་ཚོགས་དབང་རྒྱལ།

ABSTRACT

Phun tshogs dbang rgyal (b. 1993) from Ska chung (Gaqun) Community, Nyin mtha' (Ningmute) Township, Rma lho (Henan) Mongolian Autonomous County, Rma lho (Huangnan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon (Qinghai) Province, China gives an account of his horse and his family's sacred *mdzo*.

KEYWORDS

beloved Tibetan livestock, Henan Mongolian County, Qinghai, sacred *mdzo*

INTRODUCTION

I (b. 1993) am from Ska chung (Gaqun) Community, Nyin mtha' (Ningmote) Township, Rma lho (Henan) Mongolian Autonomous County, Rma lho (Huangnan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon (Qinghai) Province, PR China. I give an account of my black horse and my family's sacred *mdzo*.

MY BLACK HORSE

When I was a child, I was very excited to ride horses. Unfortunately, my family's horses were not gentle enough for a child to ride. Father then promised to buy a gentle horse for me. One day, when I returned home from primary school for the winter holiday, the weather was very cold. It was windy and heavy snow covered the grassland, making it very hard for the livestock to eat grass under the snow. Fortunately, on the upper parts of the mountains, the strong wind had blown away the snow and it was a bit easier for livestock to graze there. Father and I herded our sheep and yaks there everyday.

One afternoon, when it was nearly dusk, two men drove a herd of yaks out of a nearby valley. One of the men didn't ride. Instead, he held the horse's reins. The horse was exhausted and unable to walk very well. Father and I approached them and asked where they were from and where were they going. I supposed they were bandits, but Father was sure they were neither thieves nor bandits. He thought they were businessmen and allowed them to spend a night in our home.

The next morning when they were ready to leave, they wanted to sell my Father the tired horse cheaply. Father then bought that horse and mother made a cover for it, which kept it warm that winter. She also fed it wheat and rice soup every day.

Summer came. My weak horse was now stronger with black shiny hair. It ran swiftly on the grassland. Father drove it home and wanted to ride it, but it was very wild and hard to catch. Father was angry and disappointed, but it didn't try to escape from me. This amazed Father. At that time, a good horse was very important for a family, because there were no good roads from the county town to my

home place. Locals had to ride horses and drive pack yaks to the county town to buy necessities for their family and transport them home.

Father loved riding my black horse to the county town, because it ran quickly and didn't tire easily.

When there was a horse race in the local community, my black horse won every time. Sometimes when I was lonely, I talked to my horse like a close friend. He was very loyal and never told others what I said.

One autumn day, Father planned to go to the county town to sell butter and cheese. He then packed what he wanted to sell on three pack yaks. My brother-in-law accompanied Father to the county town.

In the early morning, Brother-in-law returned home after escorting Father to the county town. I waited patiently at home for Brother-in-law's arrival. When he returned in the afternoon, I didn't see my black horse and anxiously asked, "Where is my black horse?"

"One of our pack yaks gored it in the chest when I drove them behind the mountain. He can barely walk now," Brother-in-law replied nervously.

I immediately mounted a horse and raced to find my black horse. I climbed over a huge mountain and found him. He looked at me, and gave a weak neigh, and tried with all with his might to walk to me. I didn't know what to do. The yak horn had pierced his heart. Blood flowed constantly. Wanting to stop the bleeding, I took off my sweater and tried to staunch the bleeding. It didn't work and I slowly walked back toward home, my horse slowly trudging behind me as blood continued to ooze out of his chest. When I reached our pasture, he fell and couldn't get back up. I sat by him and chanted the Six Sacred Syllables until he stopped breathing. I returned home and went to bed without eating supper.

A SACRED *MDZO*

My family had a hundred yaks and three horses. All the horses were males. Father sold all our sheep because he said my family's summer pastures and winter pastures were unsuitable for sheep. The summer pasture was too wet, which gave the sheep a hoof disease.

My family also had a *mdzo*.¹

One morning as Father was burning incense, I brought the *mdzo* near the altar. Father then tossed milk on the *mdzo* from its back to its head, dabbed butter on its horns, and put a strip of five-colored silk in its ear. "From today, you are consecrated to the local mountain deity. No one will sell you or slaughter you for meat. We will let you live safely and naturally until you die."

Father talked to the *mdzo* as though it was a person.

I led the *mdzo*, circumambulating the altar, and then I released the *mdzo* into the herd. Father remained at the altar, chanting incense offering scriptures. Meanwhile, Elder Sister was milking in the yak enclosure and Mother was preparing breakfast in our yak hair tent.

Several days later. Father put a wooden pack frame on the *mdzo* and began to train it to pack. "First, we'll let it get used to the pack frame and then it will carry a loaded pack," Father said.

We tied the *mdzo's* feet together with a rope, placed the pack frame on it, and then used ropes to secure the pack to the *mdzo's* body to keep the frame from sliding sideways or backward.

The next morning, sister Bde skyid shouted loudly in the *nor khar* 'place where yaks are kept'. When Father and I went there, we found two dead yaks. There was no sign of disease, but our yaks continued to die. Father consulted a *bla ma* who said, "You did something to anger your local mountain deity."

"I can't remember doing any such things," Father replied.

The *bla ma* said, "Do you have a sacred yak or sheep? Did you do something with them?"

¹ A hybrid between either a male yak and female cow, or a male bull and a female yak.

Father then said, "Oh my Buddha! We do have a sacred *mdzo* and several days ago, I began to train it to pack our belongings. Maybe that upset the mountain deity."

The *bla ma* took his prayer beads from around his neck, held them, closed his eyes, and divined three times, "You put a pack frame on the *mdzo* and trained it. That angered the mountain deity, so misfortune befell your herd," the *bla ma* said.

"What should I do now my holy *bla ma*?" Father said.

"Burn incense and pray to the mountain deity for mercy. Since you have already trained it to pack, you must keep the pack frame and nose-rope clean. Don't pack polluted things such as blankets and shoes on it."

Father hurried home and did as the *bla ma* had instructed.

Some days later, local household heads went to the county town, riding horses and driving pack yaks to buy and bring back supplies. It was 200 kilometers from my home place to Rma lho County Town. It took a long time to make a return journey. Father and some of our relatives went together. During the journey, they drove the pack yaks during the day and stayed on the grassland, made a fire, and cooked for themselves at night. Sometimes they asked families they met to spend a night in their home.

One day when they were returning home, my family's sacred *mdzo* suddenly ran and jumped crazily, shaking off all the things on its back. Father thought about the night before, which they had spent with a family. They had taken off the pack frames in a small building and the next morning, they put the packs back on the yaks. Father remembered he had seen a woman's sheep-skin robe atop the sacred *mdzo's* pack. That night, Father made libations to the local mountain deity. The next morning, they got up before dawn and got ready to leave. Father carefully packed the sacred *mdzo* and it behaved normally. They returned home safely.

Some days later my brother was herding our yaks. When he brought the yaks home in the afternoon, he beat the sacred *mdzo* with an old shoe. The next day our neighbor's dog attacked him. He used his dog beater to fend off the dog. Unfortunately, the dog beater rope was too long, he lost control, and the beater stuck his forehead. When he got home, he said, "I will never again beat our sacred *mdzo*."

NON-ENGLISH TERMS

Gaqun 尕群

Henan 河南

Huangnan 黄南

mdzo མཛོ་

mtsho sngon མཚོ་སྒོ་

Ningmute 宁木特

nor khar རྫོང་ཁར་

nyin mtha' ཉིན་མཐའ་

phun tshogs dbang rgyal ཕུན་ཚོགས་དབང་རྒྱལ་

Qinghai 青海

rma lho ར་ལྷོ་

ska chung bde skyid ས་ཅུང་བདེ་སྦྱིད་